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ABSTRACT

One of 52 theoretical papers on school crime and its relation to poverty, this chapter is essentially a study of the relations between delinquency and the school system in Britain and an analysis of the extent to which British experience is relevant to the study of delinquency in the United States and in Canada. There is little serious crime in British schools, although damage to school buildings (especially arson) out of school hours is a problem. The principal significance of the British state school system in this regard is that it generates stresses and frustrations that create the conditions in which a delinquent subculture can develop and persist. This paper reviews what is known of the relations among delinquency, behavior in school, truancy, and scholastic performance, and considers how the perceptions and the behavior of teachers may mitigate or exacerbate tendencies towards the development of an antischool subculture. Connections between school and postschool concerns, the significance of the lower-class "leisure culture," and the emergence of a distinctively adolescent culture are considered. Finally, the relevance of British studies to attempts to explain the relations between school subcultures and delinquency in the United States and in Canada is discussed. (Author/MLF)

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SCHOOL, DELINQUENCY, AND THE "YOUTH CULTURE" IN BRITAIN AND NORTH AMERICA

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A paper from
"Theoretical Perspectives on School Crime"

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ABSTRACT

This paper is essentially a study of the relations between delinquency and the school system in Britain and an analysis of the extent to which British experience is relevant to the study of delinquency in the United States and in Canada. There is little serious crime in British schools, although damage to school buildings (especially arson) out of school hours is a problem. The principal significance of the British state school system in this regard is that it generates stresses and frustrations which create the conditions in which a delinquent or "delinquescent" subculture can develop and persist. This paper reviews what is known of the relations among delinquency, behavior in school, truancy, and scholastic performance, and considers how the perceptions and the behavior of teachers may mitigate or exacerbate tendencies towards the development of an antischool subculture. Connections between school and postschool concerns, the significance of the lower-class "leisure culture," and the emergence of a distinctively adolescent culture are considered. Finally, the relevance of British studies to attempts to explain the relations between school subcultures and delinquency in the United States and in Canada is discussed.

Introduction

It is difficult to arrive at even the roughest of estimates of the incidence of delinquent behavior (that is, of behavior that would in other circumstances give rise to police action) in British schools. Alarming reports of increases in abusive behavior and assaults committed by pupils against teachers appear in the press from time to time, and there are frequent accounts of damage and vandalism in schools. Many of these stories originate as examples given at teachers' conferences, usually intended to illustrate the difficulties and hazards of the teacher's job, and naturally tend to focus upon extreme instances of destructive or violent behavior.

In the strict sense of the term, school crime is rare in the British Isles. One seldom sees a policeman in a school building, and when this does happen he is usually there to give a talk to the pupils about road safety, or to make inquiries about a crime committed in the neighborhood. The courts, and the police, seldom have to take action about criminal or delinquent actions committed on school premises during the normal hours of educational activity. The uniformed policeman, a familiar figure in schools in parts of the United States (cf. Schwartz & Stryker, 1970), has no official role in British schools.

This does not mean, of course, that adolescent delinquency is not a problem in Britain, or that it is unconnected with the school. Indeed, the school itself is the target of many minor depredations: West and Farrington (1973) found that nearly three fifths of boys in a group of London schools admitted to "stealing school property worth more than about give pence" (at that time, about twelve cents), and Belson's (1975) survey put the figure as high as 88 percent -- or, if trivial thefts (less than two dollars in value) are excluded, 63 percent. But these delinquencies are, for the most part, treated as matters of school discipline, to be dealt with internally when they are detected by rebuke, loss of privileges, and, occasionally, corporal punishment. A headmaster would regard it as an humiliation to have to enlist the aid of the police in such matters.

Damage to school buildings and furniture (vandalism) is another matter, and one that has received much attention in the press in recent years. It is generally agreed that such damage occurs on a large scale and that it has increased sharply during the last decade. But it is almost impossible to arrive at a reliable estimate of the incidence or cost of such damage because few education authorities compile records of reported incidents of

willful destruction, and financial accounts relating to maintenance costs seldom differentiate between the results of vandalism and those of ordinary wear and tear. Stone and Taylor (1977) quote two systematic studies, carried out in Bedfordshire (a predominantly rural county) and Cleveland (largely urban). Both showed substantial numbers of schools with no vandalism at all during the period of the survey (three-quarters of Bedfordshire schools, a third of Cleveland schools); the average cost per pupil per year was less than a dollar in the former, and one and a half dollars in the latter. But against this reassuring picture has to be set the observation that a few schools were the targets of serious and persistent vandalism. The worst case in the Cleveland study, for instance, entailed the expenditure of 30,600 dollars on repairs--more than a third of the whole cost of maintenance--in a school with less than 1,500 pupils.

On the other hand, there are indications that setting fire to schools (which is not always, but is probably often, the work of pupils or immediate ex-pupils) is a serious and increasing problem. The total cost of fires in "maintained" schools (financially supported by

the local authority--the equivalent of the school board jurisdiction) in 1975 was about 13.6 million dollars, of which certainly three-fifths, and possibly three-quarters, was the result of arson (Stone & Taylor, 1977, pp. 13-14).

Social Class and School in Britain

The British educational system is a complex one: a full description of it would be beyond the scope of this paper. However, there are certain distinctions which must be made. The state system, which provides free education for all up to the statutory school-leaving age (now 16 years) and more advanced education for those able to benefit from it, caters to the great majority--more than 97 percent--of pupils. The private system, which includes the small group of exclusive and expensive establishments misleadingly called "public" schools," is independent of the state system, accepting pupils from private preparatory schools at about 13 years of age; the state system normally effects transfer from primary to secondary schools around age 11. The private system is, in practice, reserved for the children of upper-class and upper-middle-class parents who can afford the substantial fees; some schools offer a few

scholarships for exceptionally able pupils, but the numbers are so small that this is not a significant bridge between the private and state systems (Kalton, 1966).

The "secondary" sector of the state system--for children aged 11 upwards--contains three kinds of schools. The Education Act of 1944 (which brought about a major reorganization of British education) decreed that academically gifted children and those with aptitudes for technical subjects should be educated in schools designed for them ("selective" schools), while the majority of children--the less able--were to go to "secondary modern" schools. This scheme meant that a child who did not succeed in the competition to enter a selective school at the age of 11 had little hope of achieving the academic standard necessary for entry to one of the better-paid occupations. In recent years, the pattern has been modified by the introduction of "comprehensive" secondary schools, which provide education for able children and for those who would formerly have been assigned to a "secondary modern" school. Pupils are divided into "streams" within the school according to their ability; it is possible to transfer a child

from one stream to another with much less administrative difficulty than would be involved in moving him from, say, a "modern" school to a grammer school (Regan, 1977).

Where the selective system still prevails, almost all lower-class children go to secondary modern schools. The few who do succeed in gaining admission to selective (grammar or technical) schools seldom do as well there as children from middle-class families or those of non-manual workers, unless they are of exceptionally high intelligence. Where selection has been abolished, the new comprehensive schools are open to any child, whatever his level of ability. These are, in effect, neighborhood schools; they reflect the social class composition of the areas in which they are situated. Thus, some comprehensive schools are essentially working-class schools, while others are predominantly middle-class in character (Reid, 1977)--a state of affairs which may also be observed in the United States and in Canada. Almost all schools, selective or comprehensive, employ some system of differentiating among pupils in terms of ability. Sometimes this takes the form of "streaming" as we have already noted; in other cases, the school may group children according to their aptitude for particular

subjects ("setting") instead of making the global distinction implicit in the notion of streams. In the modern schools, and lately in the comprehensive ones, the general effect of these procedures has been to create further social class distinctions within the school, since the children of middle-class and white-collar parents tend to predominate in the higher streams or other groupings, and lower-class children gravitate to classes intended for the less able child (e.g., McDonald, 1969).

Delinquency Rates and Schools

There is no doubt that some British schools in the state system have far greater numbers of delinquent pupils than others do. As one might expect, selective (grammar and technical) schools usually have markedly lower delinquency rates than the modern and comprehensive schools. West and Farrington found one secondary modern school whose students had nearly 70 times as many court appearances, in proportion to the number of boys, as did those of a grammar school in the same area (Farrington, 1972). Gath, Cooper, Gattoni, and Rockett (1977) also report very large differences in mean annual delinquency

rates (for grammar, technical, and modern) schools, but with great variability within types, so that the "worst" of the selective schools had higher rates than the "better" modern ones. On the other hand, Douglas, Ross, and Simpson (1968) found that the proportion of trivial offenders in grammar schools was similar to that in secondary modern schools, although more serious offenders were found mainly in the latter (p. 120). McDonald (1969), investigating self-reported delinquency, rather than official convictions, noted that apparently substantial differences between grammar schools and modern schools were largely explained by the different social class composition of these schools; but she was able to show that when allowance had been made for this, the incidence of petty theft (but not of certain other kinds of delinquency) was substantially higher in modern schools. This effect was not confined to lower-class boys; middle-class pupils in modern schools also confessed to petty theft more frequently than did middle-class boys in grammar schools. This is consistent with Gibson's (1967) observation that secondary modern school boys admitted to more delinquencies, and to many more serious offences, than did grammar school boys in the same urban area.

Belson (1975) also found that boys in modern schools admitted to stealing with greater frequency than did those in selective schools, although he concluded that official records of criminal convictions tend to exaggerate this difference.

Since comparisons between grammar schools and modern schools are necessarily confounded by the effects of differences in their social class composition, it is instructive to examine the incidence of delinquency in schools which serve comparable populations. There are two examples of such studies in Britain, one in London, the other in a provincial town. Both concern secondary modern schools serving working-class communities. Power, Alderson, Phillipson, Shoenberg, & Morris (1967) found that the rates of first court appearance and conviction in 20 schools in the London borough of Tower Hamlets (all of which draw their pupils from within this predominantly working-class district) varied from 6 per 1,000 to 77 per 1,000 boys in the age range 11 to 14 years. Schools with many first convictions also had high rates of recidivism; annual rates for "all cases proven" ranged from 9 per 1,000 to 190 per 1,000 boys. Individual schools maintained their rates, and their differentials, with remarkable constancy over a six-year period, during

which, of course, the entire pupil population had been renewwd. Even reorganization of the school system, involving the closing of seven schools and the redistribution of their pupils, seems to have had little effect on the rank order, in terms of delinquency rates, of the thirteen surviving schools (see also Power, Benn, & Morris, 1972).

As Farrington (1972) pointed out, dramatic differences between schools in the incidence of delinquency may be the consequence of some kind of selection--planned or informal--which causes the lower-delinquency schools to prefer nondelinquent pupils, while youngsters already inclined to delinquency gravitate to schools which are used to dealing with boys who get into trouble. Something of this kind seems to have occurred among the thirteen schools which were responsbile for the education of four boys in five of the West and Farrington (1973) sample. However, Phillipson (1971) succeeded in demonstrating that the variations in delinquency rates between schools in Tower Hamlets could not have been the consequence of differential recruitment. His method involved calculating delinquency rates for each of the 301 small neighborhoods ("census enumeration districts") in the borough. By this means, he showed that the schools which had a great deal

of delinquency did not, in fact, recruit higher proportions of boys from high-delinquency neighborhoods than did the schools in which delinquency was rare. It is particularly striking to note that in the case of the school with the highest rate of delinquency, pupils from low-delinquency neighborhoods were equally at risk with those from high-delinquency neighborhoods; on the other hand, boys who lived in the worst neighborhoods, in terms of local delinquency rates, were less likely to get into trouble if they were sent to a school with a good record. Phillipson justifiably concludes, "Some schools apparently protect their pupils from delinquency while others may put them at risk of it" (p.245).

Reynolds (1976), giving preliminary results from his "continuing long term study of an homogeneous working class former mining community," presents data which add strong support to the contention that schools have an important influence on whether or not a youngster becomes delinquent. There are nine secondary modern schools in Reynold's community, taking "what is regarded as the bottom two-thirds of the ability range." His figures show a variation in the annual rates of first convictions from 3.8 per 100 boys in the least delinquent school to 10.5 per 100 in the school with the highest incidence

of delinquency. This variation is not attributable to differences in the social class composition of the pupil populations of the schools, which are slight and apparently unrelated to delinquency rates.

There is, however, an interesting relationship between the incidence of delinquency and two other variables which may reasonably be regarded as indices of the extent to which the school is meeting the needs of its pupils: average attendance and academic success (in this case, measured by the frequency with which pupils pass the examinations necessary to gain admission to technical college, the vital step towards a skilled, better-paid occupation). Both attendance and academic success showed high stability over a period of seven years--more than one "generation" of pupils. Both are substantially correlated with annual delinquency rates ($r = -.58$ and $-.53$, respectively) for the nine schools. "The nine schools are therefore producing children [i.e., boys] who appear to be very different, to be consistently different over time and to be consistently different on three separate indicators" (p. 129).

Reynolds's thesis (to which we will return shortly) is that delinquency is one component in a triad of indices which reflect the extent to which pupils are alienated

from the school and its activities and goals. Other writers have advanced similar notions to explain the connection between poor school performance and delinquency in the individual offender; what is original in Reynolds's work is his use of these attributes to characterize differences between schools. His argument is perhaps best approached by way of a review of what is known about the delinquent in, and out of, school.

School Attendance and Classroom Behavior

The uncertain and increasingly remote relation between the future delinquent and his school is well documented by Douglas, Ross, and Simpson (1968) in their developmental study of 4,720 children born in Great Britain in a single week in 1946. They report that those boys who eventually became delinquent were sharply distinguished from their nondelinquent peers by notably poor records of school attendance. Trivial offenders were distinguished from nonoffenders and serious and recidivist delinquents were distinguished from trivial offenders by the extent of their truancy, usually before they received their first convictions. "It is clear that they were reluctant scholars even before they get into trouble" (p. 121). This reluctance is well

demonstrated by the frequency with which delinquents leave school at the earliest possible moment (p. 122).

Truancy is mentioned by several investigators as a reliable (and early) sign of the disposition to delinquency. More than fifty years ago Burt (1925) remarked, "As a rule, truancy is little thought of. But, in actual fact, it is usually the first step on the downward stair to crime--the first premonitory portent of far more desperate misdemeanors" (p. 455). Half a century later, Belson (1975) observed "a fairly strong association between the frequency of admitted truancy and the amount and variety of stealing" in his sample of 1,425 London schoolboys, noting that both truancy and stealing seemed to be associated with "a dislike of school-work and of teachers" (pp. 384,399). West and Farrington (1973) found that early truancy (between the ages of 8 and 10) was rare, but 14 out of 24 boys who were so identified went on to become "official" delinquents. By comparison, Andry's (1960) study of delinquents in a remand home in London showed that most of them (88 percent) admitted to truancy, compared with 46 percent of his controls, who were drawn from neighboring schools. But these figures must be treated with caution, since a history of truancy

may be one of the factors taken into account in deciding whether or not to send a boy to a remand home.

Although it seems reasonable to regard truancy as an indication that the child is becoming alienated from school, truancy is not the only sign of alienation. Mulligan, Douglas, Hammond, and Tizard (1963) found that secondary school teachers who were asked to rate their pupils on such characteristics as persistent disobedience in the classroom, resentment of criticism or punishment, lying to evade trouble, cheating on schoolwork, being aggressive and quarrelsome with other children, being "rough" in the playground, and playing truant from school picked out about half of the persistent delinquents in their classes, although this was not the discrimination they were trying to make. The implication is that the delinquent frequently identifies himself by misbehavior in the classroom of a kind which suggests that he has lost patience with school and teachers--an observation which confirms Khleif's (1964) finding that one can often distinguish delinquents by adverse comments about their behavior in school in teachers' annual reports.

Similar observations are reported by West and Farrington (1973), who asked teachers to make ratings of "troublesomeness" (briefly, laziness, inattention, lack

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of interest in school, restlessness, difficulties with other children in class, uncleanliness and untidiness, attendance [truancy], and response to discipline) at age 8, and again at age 10. High scores on this assessment were strongly predictive of future "official" delinquency (51 out of 84 boys who were later convicted were in the top third of scores on this scale) and also of recidivism (30 out of 37 recidivists were in the top third); although truancy, where it occurred, was predictive of delinquency, most of the unfavorable assessments were based mainly on classroom behavior and personal appearance. Stott (1963) has demonstrated that an inventory of behavioral signs of "maladjustment," completed by teachers whose opportunity to observe the child is effectively restricted to the classroom and the playground, can discriminate between delinquents and others, mainly through recording aggressive, hostile, and quarrelsome behavior (cf. Kvaraceus, 1961, for a fairly close parallel in the United States.) Stott (1964) also found that teachers' ratings on the Bristol Social Adjustment Guide differentiated with moderate accuracy between those probationers who were destined to get into further trouble and those who would not--an observation which invites

comparison with Reiss's (1952) study in Chicago. In a follow-up study, Stott and Wilson (1977) were able to show that juvenile probationers whose scores indicated a high degree of maladjustment (of a specific type observed to be characteristic of delinquents) were much more likely to incur further convictions as adults than were their less "maladjusted" peers.

There is thus little disagreement that delinquents are discriminable (and, indeed, can often be identified even before they get into trouble with the police) by school behavior which indicates that they are not amenable to the norms of conduct teachers expect their pupils to observe in the classroom. But there is controversy about the direction of causation. At one extreme, Stott (1962; also Stott & Wilson, 1977) regards disruptive behavior in the classroom and delinquency as concomitant manifestions of a predisposition to deviant behavior that is probably due to prenatal causes, or at least intimately connected with physical disabilities.

Delinquency and Failure in School

It is fair to say that Stott's view is not widely shared. Most writers agree that delinquency outside the school and resentful, rebellious behavior within it are

connected in some way with relative academic failure, although (again) there are differing opinions as to the nature of the connection. Briefly, explanations can be divided into those which interpret delinquency as a reaction to personal failure in school (which may, of course, be partly or largely the consequence of social handicaps, as in the case of youngsters from lower-class families where educational ambitions are neither supported nor understood); those that emphasize the consequences of academic selection, streaming, and other ways of differentiating between pupils; and those which place particular stress on the irrelevance of middle-class-dominated schools to the abilities and "focal concerns" (Miller, 1958) of lower-class culture. Some light is cast on the issue by what is known of the relations between school performance and the two (inconveniently interlocked) variables of type of school and the socioeconomic status of the family from which the youngster comes. We have already noted that selective schools (grammar and technical schools), which have relatively high academic standards, consistently show a substantially lower incidence of delinquency than do modern schools. But they also, of course, recruit a very much higher proportion of their

pupils from middle-class and skilled-working-class families, as contrasted with the families of unskilled, unemployed, or semiskilled workers. We have also seen, from Reynolds's (1976) study, that a fairly strong relationship between level of academic achievement and delinquency rates was discernible within a group of nine modern schools. But the more important issue is whether delinquent individuals differ from their nondelinquent peers in the same school in educational attainment. There is substantial evidence that they do. For instance, Douglas, Ross, and Simpson (1968) found that all groups of delinquents--trivial, serious, and repeaters--had poor scores on a group of measures which included verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests and assessments of reading and mathematics. This was not, as might be suspected, simply the consequence of being brought up in unfavorable home circumstances. The investigators found that when they had made due allowance for the effects of family size, socioeconomic status, standard of maternal care, and standards of housing (making use of observed correlations between these things and the test scores in the cohort as a whole), those boys who became delinquents showed poorer school performance than one would expect, and the repeaters

were notably worse than occasional delinquents in this respect, especially in tests of reading and mathematics. The low attainments of the future delinquents could already be discerned in the results of tests administered when they were 8 years old, and the gap between them and their nondelinquent peers persisted, without noticeably widening, for the rest of their school careers (which were typically concluded by leaving school at the earliest legal moment). There was, however, a somewhat different pattern for those delinquents who had been identified by their teachers as particularly troublesome and aggressive in class; unlike the delinquents who hadn't been considered troublesome, they did show substantial academic deterioration during their school careers. (This finding is reminiscent of Gold's (1970) observation that boys were "more frequently and seriously delinquent if their grades were poor" (p. 124).

West and Farrington found that both "official" delinquents and those who, though undetected, admitted to delinquent activities in a card-sorting self-report procedure showed poor educational attainments and low scores on a verbal measure of intelligence. This appears to have been most clearly evident in the recidivist group, although no figures are given for the performance of the

undected, self-reported delinquents. A third British study, carried out by Ferguson (1952) in the years immediately following World War II, showed a strong correlation between low performance in school and likelihood of being convicted of a crime either before or immediately after leaving school. In his substantial sample of 1,349 Glasgow schoolboys, the risk of being convicted before reaching the age of 18 was five times higher for boys in the lowest tenth of the cohort in terms of attainment, compared with those in the top decile.

There seems to be no disagreement among British investigators, then, that both delinquency and persistence in delinquency (recidivism) are commonly associated with poor educational attainments. There are differences of opinion, however, as to how this observation should be interpreted. West and Farrington, though characteristically cautious, incline to the view that the crucial variable is level of intelligence. They point out that the delinquents in their sample performed less well than nondelinquents on several tests of intelligence, both verbal and nonverbal, at the ages of 8, 10, and 11, and that they were regarded by their peers and by their teachers as not very intelligent. Although other investigators (particularly in

the United States) have repeatedly, but not universally, demonstrated that the apparent dullness of delinquents is partly or wholly the result of verbal deficiencies, this does not appear to have been the case in the West-Farrington study. It is notable, also, that although Douglas, Ross, & Simpson (1968) did find the expected discrepancies between scores on verbal and nonverbal tests of intelligence, they (like West and Farrington) found that the delinquents, especially the recidivist delinquents, had lower average scores on nonverbal tests than did nondelinquents from comparable social backgrounds.

West and Farrington point out that the observed differences in intelligence test performance, though very consistent, are small; one would not be justified in concluding that the individuals concerned had slipped into delinquency because of their intellectual limitations. It is by no means certain that nonverbal tests, such as Raven's Matrices test (which they used), can safely be assumed to be unaffected by deficiencies in the development of language skills (Trasler, 1970). And it is entirely possible (as West and Farrington point out) that dullness may increase the risk of getting caught--although that does not explain why the self-reported delinquents should

produce poorer scores than did the boys who reported neither delinquencies nor convictions.

Whatever the connection may be between low scores on intelligence tests and delinquency, it is obviously not a simple one. Many (perhaps most) boys of limited intelligence do not become delinquents, and it is arguable that school failure is a much more significant element in the genesis of delinquency than low intelligence is. Clearly, a boy who is slow in grasping the content of lessons is more likely than a quick-witted boy, other things being equal, to fail in school; but so are children who are inattentive or alienated from school, whatever their level of ability. Failure in school may have various causes, but it seems unreasonable to deny that it must often have an amplifying effect, transforming an initial handicap into a far-reaching personal disaster.

The Consequences of Selection in Education

How this may happen is the subject of a group of recent, and extraordinarily interesting, essays by British sociologists. Hargreaves (1967) made a participant-observer study of the social structure of a secondary modern school (pseudonymed "Lumley School") in a problem area of the north Midlands of England, taking the role of a teacher in

the school. The principal focus of his research was the impact of the system of streaming by which boys were grouped, year by year, into parallel classes according to their academic abilities. Hargreaves focused his attention on the fourth form (boys in the last compulsory year of school, aged between 14 and 15). It turned out that the real distinction, in practice, was between the "academic" streams 4A and 4B (which contained many boys who intended to stay in school for another year or two) and 4C and 4D, which consisted of boys who were generally regarded as "thick" (stupid) and who were unaminous in their determination to abandon school as soon as they could.

Streaming in a secondary modern school such as Lumley School is effected when boys first enter at the age of 11, and can be reviewed, on the basis of examination performance, at any time. It represents an increasingly refined differentiation, in terms of apparent academic potential, among boys who have already been classified as being among the less academically promising two-thirds of children of their age by being assigned to a modern school rather than to a grammar or technical school. In such circumstances, assignment to a low stream within the school is a particularly emphatic indication of academic failure.

Hargreaves describes the development of two opposing subcultures, in these conditions, during the four years of compulsory schooling. The "academic" subculture, which included most of the boys in the upper streams, was "characterized by values . . . positively orientated to the school and the teachers" (pp. 161-162) and reflected the "concerns" of striving for achievement and toward long-term goals, willingness to defer gratification, rationality, and responsibility that seem to be normal among middle-class adolescents, especially among upwardly mobile lower-middle- and upper-lower-class youngsters on both sides of the Atlantic (cf. Kvaraceus & Miller, 1967; Cohen, 1967). The lower streams, on the other hand, developed a system of values which was "negatively orientated to the school"--an inversion of the value system of the upper streams, and strongly at variance with the professed aims of the school. Hargreaves described this as "a delinquescent subculture," that is to say, a subculture which permits and facilitates delinquency, if it does not actually promote it. This is, in Cohen's (1955) sense, an oppositional subculture, involving the explicit rejection of the attitudes and values, the codes of behavior, and the criteria of personal status that are shared by teachers and the higher-stream

boys. "Having fun," physical toughness and aggressiveness, and skill in repartee displaced the conventional virtues of the school; these were the qualities which made a boy popular and respected in the lower streams.

This description of a "delinquescent" subculture shows fairly close parallels with Sugarman's (1967) analysis. He suggested that

> What happened in the last few years in Britain . . . is that a new "contra-culture" has emerged within the context of the emergent youth culture. This is the role of a "teenager" which is, roughly, an inversion of the official "pupil" role. In place of the officially-expected deferred gratification it puts an emphasis on spontaneous gratification or hedonism . . .on any given social level, the amount of support a schoolboy can get from his fellows for rejecting the values that the school is trying to put over is now greater than ever. In conflict with the school is a rival view of life which is now held fairly self-consciously though not very explicitly by a fair number of pupils in common. (p. 154)

Sugarman used a questionnaire to test the hypothesis that a high degree of commitment to the teenage youth culture would be associated with unfavorable attitudes

toward school and toward the central values represented by the school, such as devotion to long-term goals at the expense of immediate satisfactions. This proved to be so. He also found that pupils who exhibited strong commitment to the youth culture usually attracted unfavorable comments from their teachers, who regarded them as badly behaved; their educational achievements were poor in relation to their measured ability. They were, for the most part "assessed from their reports on how many books their homes contained, what newspaper their parents read and whether they ever take or send them to museums, plays or concerts" (p. 158).

> ...pupils from high quality homes who are under-achievers or have bad conduct ratings are much more likely to be high on teenage commitment than other pupils from such a background. Similarly, those from low quality homes who are over-achievers or have good conduct ratings are very much more likely to be low on teenage commitment than others from such backgrounds. (p. 159)

One of the most interesting aspects of Hargreaves's study is the demonstration that the gradual differentiation and eventual polarization of the two subcultures was

effected partly through choice of friends. Boys in the upper streams typically chose their companions among other academically inclined boys, while those in the lower academic streams (and also those destined to be transferred from the higher streams to the lower ones because they were failing to make the grade) tended to find friends with equally meager scholastic achievements and abilities. Not surprisingly, appearances in court were much more common among boys in the lower streams (especially the lowest) than among boys in the upper streams; similar differences were apparent in the frequency with which boys admitted to stealing things, whether or not they had been caught. The contrasts were striking: only 7 percent of boys in the highest stream admitted to recent thefts, while 64 percent of those in the lowest stream did so. (This difference is not simply a reflection of willingness to confess: the figures for court convictions show a similar ratio.)

Teachers at Lumley School firmly believed that the streaming system grouped boys accurately in terms of their ability. But Hargreaves found that the process of transferring some boys from one stream to another, which went on during the first three years, supposedly to correct initial errors in streaming, actually increased the heterogeneity, in terms of measured intelligence, of each stream. This was

because "membership of a high stream [was] a function not simply of ability but of positive orientation to academic values, the reverse being true of low streams" (p. 191). In fact, the lower streams seem to have recruited some boys of relatively high IQ but mediocre academic performance (underachievers) in this process of restreaming.

Although the competitive system of examinations and transfer between streams ("double failure," as Hargreaves described it) provided the conditions in which the two contrasting subcultures appeared and were developed and amplified, it is clear that they had their roots in different perceptions of the value and purpose of education among the boys' parents. These were, predictably, class-linke

> The academic subculture thus predominantly consists of boys from homes which are more orientated to the middle class, and the pressures in the peer group are towards conformity to the middle class expectations of the teachers. In the delinquescent sub-culture, a majority of boys comes from homes which are less orientated to middle-class values and the peer group exerts pressures towards non-conformity to the school's values. In cases at each extreme home and school are mutually reinforcing ... [and] subcultural differentiation is considerably facilitated. When peer group and home conflict, the pupil is faced with a problem of adjustment. (p. 168)

Hargreaves's study has been widely interpreted as demonstrating that delinquency is the simple consequence of educational failure. This is surely a mistake. Lumley School reflected class-linked inequalities and confusion about objectives which are typical of schools in the English-speaking countries -- although they are especially conspicuous in Britain because of the peculiar significance of social class in that country. Educational attainment is the key to high-status occupations; upward social mobility is, in principle, possible for any child through the mechanisms of a school system which employs selective devices to distinguish the able from the less talented. The prevailing myth, which informs many of the practices of secondary schools, asserts that the means of educational success, and thus of social advancement, are accessible to any child, regardless of his social origins, if he possesses the intellectual capacity to take advantage of them. In practice this is not -- and has never been -- the case (Murdock & McCron, 1976); in these circumstances, the very existence of the myth, and its overt acceptance by teachers and by some pupils and parents, has the effect of exaggerating the insult tendered to those children to whom the opportunity is not, in practice, available because of the complex handicaps of growing up in a lower-class

family.

Social Class and Educational Handicaps

The most important of these handicaps have to do with the extent to which the child is supported in his endeavors in school by his family and his peers. There are profound differences in this respect, which begin to make their impact long before he starts school. Middle-class parents, and working-class parents who are ambitious for their children, provide motivation, confidence, and basic educational skills, which together constitute a good preparation for school, and active support and encouragement to the child when he has begun his studies. They see the importance of educational achievement and regard school and teachers as allies in realizing their ambitions. By contrast, other parents see no point in formal education, are not interested in their children's progress, and, consequently, do not equip them with the confidence and support that are necessary for achievement in a highly competitive system. Douglas, Ross, and Simpson (1968) noted that "within each social class the parents of delinquent boys stand out as taking little interest in their sons' school work and in being prepared to let them leave school at the earliest

opportunity" (p. 119). They also found that

> The highest risk is in the lower manual working class and it seems that lack of education of the parents or the low interest in education that goes with it is an additional important factor since, even within the lower manual working class, the boys are less likely to become delinquent if their parents had made some attempt to get further education . . . after leaving school, even if this attempt had been unsuccessful in producing further qualifications. (p. 119, summarizing findings of Douglas, Ross, Hammond, & Mulligan, 1966)

The differences are not exclusively motivational. Bernstein (1961, 1962, 1965) has provided an analysis of styles of spoken language which implies that starting school confronts most lower-class children with problems of understanding and communication for which they are unprepared; the middle-class child, or one who has been prepared by his parents for school, does not experience the discouraging shock of linguistic discontinuity (cf. Lawton, 1968). Many lower-class children have particular difficulties in coping with the question-answer interchange which is, of course, an important feature of the classroom (Robinson & Rackstraw, 1971).

As Hargreaves perceptively pointed out, delinquency

develops from this complex of conflicting social values, not as a demonstration of despair, but as the consequence of assimilation into an alternative subcultural pattern which is baded on energetic rejection of a value system that ascribes importance to achievements which are at once irrelevant to and unattainable by the average lower-class child. He rejects the "Establishment" conception of education for a confident endorsement of the lower-class concerns of toughness, risk-taking, and "smartness," which, as Miller (1958) observes, inevitably lead to trouble with the police. While a few lower-class youngsters, spurred on and supported by their families, take the "college boys" path (Cohen, 1955) to social advancement through achievement in school, the usual style of adaptation is one that involves disdain for the professed goals of the school and enthusiastic endorsement of values which are, at best, independent of those reflected in the classroom and in the criminal law.

The opposition between the professed values of the school, on the one hand, and the strong (and largely justified) conviction of many lower-class pupils that these values are spurious, or at least irrelevant to their own careers, on the other, poses major problems for teachers in British schools which cater mainly to boys who have no hope of social advancement. Lumley School was

perhaps unusual in having a thriving element of boys for whom the "academic subculture," the orthodox doctrine of the school system, had validity. Many schools do not have this element of potentially "successful" boys; these schools confront teachers with the choice of clinging to policies and procedures which are transparently inappropriate to the pupils with whom they are concerned or abandoning the orthodox myth of equal opportunity for policies based on the realistic recognition that lower-class boys have little hope of gaining social advancement or personal advantage through the agency of the school.

Teachers and Reluctant Pupils

The problem is well illustrated in Reynolds's (1976) analysis of a group of nine secondary modern schools in a working-class community, to which we have already referred. Reynolds found, as Hargreaves had done, that "an anti-school subculture" begins to appear during the third year (that is, from about the age of 13). Around this age, many boys abandon the styles of dress, manners, and speech that are characteristic of the conforming schoolboy for ways which more closely resemble those of young men of the urban working class to which their families belong, and in which their own futures lie. They are realistic about this:

they are content to look forward to manual jobs which would demand little by way of formal educational qualifications. School has become to them "an irrelevance, a period of transition between the juniors [that is, elementary school] and the real world of work, money and traditional valley life that they wish to pass to as soon as possible"(Reynolds, 1976, p. 133).

In these circumstances, teachers must either acknowledge that there is no longer any point in persisting with the pretense that they are preparing their boys for careers in which educational attainments are necessary or face growing resentment and resistance to their attempts to maintain the patterns of discipline and conformity that are characteristic of schools and are normally justified and enforced through the mutual recognition, by teachers and pupils, that boys stand to gain a long-term advantage by accepting these constraints on their freedom of action. To boys who have come to regard school as irrelevant to their personal futures, as a period of waiting imposed by statute, rules about dress and behavior seem unnecessary and pointless, and attempts to enforce them may well be resented. As Reynolds remarks,

> Whereas grammar schools are able to offer a route to high status occupations as a reward for their pupils' acceptance

> of the schools' standards, secondary modern schools cannot expect such commitment because they have little to offer that their pupils want. Order within these schools will not be maintained simply by the normative or instrumental commitment obtained by the schools' unspoken promise of a successful future, and is only likely to be obtained by the increased use of coercion. (p. 132; compare Finlayson & Loughran, 1976)

Most teachers are able to negotiate a compromise in the classroom--an arrangement, explicit or not, according to which they moderate the academic demands they make on pupils in return for a measure of order and harmony in school. An understanding of this kind is acceptable to the teacher; he is not reneging on his own standards of scholarship, since he can (if he needs to do so) characterize these pupils are "thick," and thus exonerate himself of responsibility for wringing further scholastic achievement from them (a process of rationalization vividly depicted in Hargreaves's study of teachers' attitudes). A more important difficulty arises in relation to behavior out of school and such nonacademic matters as dress, punctuality, and manners. Teachers usually believe it to be part of their professional role to do what they can to influence the behavior of their pupils in these respects, but there is greater uncertainty and disagreement

among teachers about this aspect of their activities than about academic or pedagogic matters (cf. Phillipson, 1971). As a result, some teachers will persevere in their attempts to control out-of-school behavior, such as smoking, the consumption of alcohol, and "rowdy" conduct in the streets, even when they are dealing with boys in the lower streams of the third and fourth years of school. These boys are already perceiving themselves as young men, as the cadet members, so to speak, of the adult male society, and are, therefore, impatient and resentful of attempts to restrict what they see as legitimate, manly activities. Since this is an aspect of the teacher's role about which there is uncertainty, where the conventions and limits are less clear-cut, inconsistencies in practice between one teacher and another intensify the resentment which boys feel at "illegitimate" attempts to interfere with their out-of-school lives, and the teacher who believes it to be a duty to impose authority in such matters may adopt a heavy-handed attitude which he or she would not contemplate on strictly pedagogic issues. There are here the ingredients of serious conflict.

Reynolds argues that conflict usually is averted by a "truce," in which the teacher concedes that he or she

> will no longer proceed against the pupils to any great extent to ensure compliance with expressive, non-pedagogic or character-moulding goals since he knows that to do so will only produce rebellion, a rebellion that by lowering pupils' overall level of commitment to the school will make it even more difficult for the school to maintain control . . . [This] also means that the staff accept that their authority does not extend outside the school gates or outside school hours. Drinking in a pub under age, although technically an offense, will be ignored by the teachers, as will smoking going to and from school, and various petty misbehaviors such as fighting in the street. (p. 133)

The advantage to be gained by such a truce is peace in the classroom and the avoidance of confrontation about out-of-school behavior. Reynolds contends that rejection--presumably by the teachers--of this way of resolving the conflict inherent in the diverging values of the school and its pupils is likely to result in an outbreak of deviant behavior: "Where there is this sort of conflict in a school . . . there will invariably be vandalism within it, truanting from it and delinquency outside it" (p. 136). He seems to be arguing that the truce, in practice, allows teachers to maintain some degree of control over the out-of-school behavior of pupils, which would be lost if the opportunity of establishing such an

understanding were not taken--there would be "a weakening of the 'moral bind' which ties the child to conventional adult life and institutions" (p. 136). It is apparently Reynolds's provisional conclusion that the wide variation in delinquency rates in his nine schools is to be explained in terms of the establishment of a truce of this kind between teachers and pupils.

At this stage of the research, Reynold's observations are perhaps more important than his inferences. There is an impressive amount of agreement among Hargreaves, Phillipson, and Reynolds about the causes of alienation from the school in British system of education, and their arguments carry convincing implications about the connections between experience in school and delinquency outside it for pupils in the working-class strata of British society. It has to be admitted, however, that there is, as yet, little supporting evidence, although what there is (notably in the work of West and Farrington) is consistent with the general drift of their arguments. There are theoretical problems, however. For example, Hargreaves describes the antiacademic "delinquescent" value system as an oppositional (Cohen, 1955) subculture; on the other hand, Reynolds seems to regard out-of-school delinquency as the natural expression of lower-class concerns

or conventions, normally but not invariably restrained by the negotiated authority of school teachers. The former view represents delinquency as a reaction, a defensive response, to the unfairnesses of a social system; the latter refers to differential controls over behavioral tendencies which apparently do not require explanation.

Subcultures

It is arguable, however, that these writers are addressing themselves to different questions. In order to substantiate a subculture explanation of deviant behavior, one has to explain how the subculture arose; how it is maintained; and why the values, beliefs, and attitudes which constitute it form a coherent system, rather than an unstructured miscellany--for the persistence of a subculture depends upon its integrity, the extent to which it appears to its members to constitute a true or convincing account of their needs or problems and the means of resolving them. The work of Hargreaves, of Reynolds, and of Douglas and his colleagues shows clearly the nature of the problem facing a lower-class boy in the British socioeducational system--a problem of progressive disadvantage, discouragement, and alienation from the school and the values on which it is based that is strikingly and

depressingly similar on both sides of the Atlantic. The solution to the problem is not, as a rule, individual rebellion or personal retaliation against an inflexible and inaccessible system of social advancement, but identification with an existing subculture which is maintained in being because it provides its members with an acceptable status as cadet members of a male adult elite in which relative failure in school carries no penalty and is of no consequence. Why the subculture should perform this function is explained by Cohen's (1955) exposition of the theory of the oppositional subculture, convincingly applied to contemporary British society by Hargreaves. The internal structure of the value system, its roots in lower-class concerns, and the gradual differentiation of an identificable teenage leisure culture are described by Sugarman (1967), Downes (1966), and Murdock and McCron (1976), in terms which owe a great deal to sociologists in Canada and the United States (e.g., Vaz, 1976; Cohen, 1955, 1967; Miller, 1968; Kvaraceus, 1961; Kvaraceus & Miller, 1967). The special contribution of writers such as Phillipson and Reynolds has been to show that the subculture is supported by the perceptions of teachers and by their reactions to the behavior of their pupils.

It is instructive to see the extent to which the apparently independent observations of psychologists and sociologists lend support to this account of the matter. Although not all of them would accept such an interpretation, it is arguable that West and Farrington, Gibson, Stott, and others have accurately observed the handicaps, the frustrations, and the gap between potential and its realization that reflect the increasing alienation of the lower-class pupil from the school--a process that is exacerbated in various ways by the manner in which young delinquents are identified (Farrington, 1977) and by the average teacher's response to youthful rebellion (Phillipson, 1971). Indeed, there is no essential inconsistency between this view and the belief that some delinquency represents the unfolding of a prenatal defect which handicaps the individual (e.g., Stott, 1962), although there are equally plausible explanations in terms of class-linked, postnatal disadvantage (Bernstein, 1961, 1962, 1965; Robinson & Rackstraw, 1971).

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

There remain questions about the extent to which these observations have meaning and validity outside the British

Isles. Handicaps associated with social class are probably more pronounced and more potentially damaging to the individual in Britain than in Canada or the United States. There is a sense in which Canadians and Americans respond to what an individual has achieved which contrasts with the British emphasis on where, in the complex scheme of social status, he originated. The effect of these cultural differences is to exaggerate, but not to invalidate, analyses of the effects of social handicaps based upon British studies. Downes (1966) argues that the British working-class adolescent is "twice disadvantaged"--first in education and employment, and secondly in his attempts to participate in the leisure culture. His experience in school and in the first years of unskilled work is characterized by futility, monotony, and boredom. Unlike the middle-class youth or the working-class but socially mobile "college boy," he has little to look forward to in his working career. He wants enjoyment, excitement, a chance to assert his independence, and, as a young man with a pay enevelop, he feels that he has a right to these privileges of adulthood, at least in his free time. The pleasures and luxuries of an affluent consumer society are insistently presented through the mass media of communication, especially through television.

But these things are beyond his reach--not necessarily because he cannot afford them, but because access to the more glamourous and stylish ways of enjoying leisure is unavailable to him for social reasons. He lives in a home and a neighborhood which bear little resemblance to the elegant, pampered environment in which the more privileged spent their leisure time. Access to the more exciting leisure activities is hedged about by a range of social barriers which make it impossible for the lower-class youth to participate in pursuits and pleasures which he could afford. He finds that, in this respect at least, his money is emphatically not "as good as anyone else's." Thus, the class-linked disadvantages which contribute to failure in school persist, in other forms, into the worlds of work and adult leisure, for the British working class and compound the perceived unfairness of a system based upon very unequal opportunity. Faced with these further (and largely unanticipated) frustrations, the working-class adolescent is under great pressure to seek status and self-regard in the society of other young men with similar problems and similar resentments. He "reacts against both middle class and 'lower class' culture, and arrives at the 'delinquent subculture' by pushing the legitimate

values of the 'teenage culture' to their logical conclusion" (Downes, 1966, p. 134).

The most significant difference between British society and the cultures of Canada and the United States lies, perhaps, in the second component of the Downes's double disadvantage, the leisure-culture-access one. The evidence suggests that the handicaps of the lower-class pupil in school are comparable in severity, if rather different in quality, in all three countries. His chances of achieving scholastic success, and thus gaining entry into an occupation that will provide high status and a substantial income, are slender indeed in all three. To the extent that delinquency is a consequence, or at least a by-product, of alienation from the school and from the system of social preferment and discrimination of which the school is a part, there seems little to choose between the three countries. Perhaps the most significant contribution to this analysis provided by the British studies is in drawing attention to the way in which distinctions and discriminations--often of a subtle kind--may aggravate the insult, the sense of alienation, of the lower-class adolescent, even after he has left school and the competitive but stacked educational system behind him. Although this

depressing phenomenon may be most easily discernible in the British culture, it would surely be rash to assume that it is peculiar to that country.

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